

City Talk Column for July 24, 2024

Communications, Tourism and Economic Initiatives Department

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Tourism Program update

It is an honor to be serving as the first Tourism Manager for the city of Sedona. I've spent the last 10 years working exclusively within the management side of the tourism industry within the state tourism offices in Oregon and Colorado. My "why" has always been to implement sustainable tourism practices that generate a net gain in communities by balancing residential quality of life, protection of the natural and built environment and the prosperity of local businesses. This is the foundation thinking that I am bringing into this position, and I look forward to developing working relationships with everyone to advance responsible and respectful tourism in Sedona.

We live in such an incredible and unique location that has the ability to positively change people's lives. As I've been reading through the background research we have on visitor sentiment, a finding stuck out that identifies one of Sedona's differentiators is that we leave an *enduring* impact on people's lives. What we offer in terms of scenic beauty, outdoor recreation, culinary, arts and culture, dark skies and mindfulness is unmatched, and is the primary reason why so many of us first arrived in Sedona as a visitor before becoming residents. I first visited Sedona during a mother-son trip in 2008 and can personally attest to the enduring impact that memory has had in my life.

The timing could not be better for me to begin working as the city's first Tourism Manager. We are in the final stages of launching a new Tourism Strategic Plan that will shape the work ahead for the city's Tourism Program. Structured as an 18-month plan through December 31, 2025, the plan is broken into four imperatives – Destination Management and Stewardship, Economic Vitality, Community Engagement and Organizational Development.

This dynamic strategic plan will allow the city to implement tourism strategies that can best serve the evolving needs of our community throughout the year. We know that there are times of the year where our investments in tourism need to be focused on amplifying efforts to reduce vehicle congestion and educating visitors about our expectations of them while they are here. We also know that there are times of year where investments in tourism need to focus on inspiring visitors from all corners of the world that want to join us in protecting this place and spending their dollars to keep our local businesses thriving. Ultimately, our goal is to use our access to research and community input to strike the right balance between these two needs.

For example, you can expect to see us increase the ways we encourage responsible and respectful use of Sedona. These messages will go beyond the seven Leave No Trace principles and focus on the behaviors that we prioritize as a community to address. We also want to encourage our guests to leave a legacy behind by donating their time or dollars to non-profit organizations that are working on projects that benefit visitor experience in Sedona.

We are also planning to launch a "State of Sedona Tourism" transparency hub on the city's website that will provide data on tourism performance and the return on investment from our marketing activities.

The goal is for this to provide regular updates on the economic performance that impacts the city's bed and sales tax. It will also communicate how we are successfully targeting our marketing efforts to attract visitors that align with Sedona's values.

I'm very appreciative of this opportunity and want to thank everyone that has provided me with such a warm welcome so far. I look forward to the collective impact we can achieve by coming together to strike a balance between our quality of life, protection of the environment and the health of local economy.